ANOTHER'S CRIME!

FROM THE DIARY OF INSPECTOR BYRNES.

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"The Great Bank Robbery," "An American Penman," Etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN A CARRIAGE.

JUDGE KETELLE and his young wife took up their abode in a house not far from the southern boundary of Central Park, taking Mrs. Nolen to live with them. The wedding aroused considerable interest in New York city, the beauty and accomplishments of the bride being almost as well known as the forensic and judicial ability of her husband. The newly married couple did not entertain, however, owing to the recent domestic misfortunes which had overtaken Mrs. Ketelle's family; they received a few friends very quietly and informally, and made scarcely any calls. The judge had not been on the bench for some years previous to his marriage; but he had a large and important pratice as a barrister, and he now devoted himself to this with more assiduity than ever. Report had it that he and his wife were very happy together, and though some people admired the judge's intrepidity in venturing to appropriate a lady so beautiful and so much his junior, there was nothing in their relations to indicate that his choice had not been as prudent as it certainly was enviable.

The wedding had taken place about the first of October, on the return of the Nolens and Judge Ketelle from the seaside; and after a short honeymoon they settled in their new dwelling early in November. The judge attended to business down town every day; his wife spent her mornings at home, and in the afternoons was fond of driving out in the park in her brougham, occasionally accompanied by her mother, but more often alone. The weather was cold but very fine, and the hue of the autumn leaves was unusually beautiful. But those who happened to see the face of the young wife at the window of her brougham forgot all about the autumnal foliage and had their thoughts filled with the memory of another kind of loveliness.

One afternoon, while passing the children's play ground, Mrs. Ketelle caused the coachman to stop his horses in order that she might watch the little creatures at their games, for nothing pleased her more than the spectacle of children having a good time.

After remaining a few minutes, she was about to give the order to move on, when her attention was attracted to a gentleman who was standing with his back partly turned towards her in a footpath that here approached the carriage way. He was tall and well made; he wore a thin cape ulster of dark tweed and a black felt hat with a curved brim—a sort of fashionable modification of the picturesque Tyrolese headgear. Of his face she could see only the outline of the cheek and brow; he had a mustache and a short, closely cut beard.

Why was it that the sight of this man produced so strange and powerful an impression upon her? She asked herself this question, but could give no satisfactory answer. Surely he was not an acquaintance of hers! And yet there was something about him that not only arrested her gaze but sent a thrill to her heart, as if particles of ice and fire were being driven through it. Her hands became cold and her teeth chattered, and yet her cheeks were burning and drops stood on her forehead.

The gentleman turned slowly to resume his walk. As his face came more fully into view Mrs. Ketelle caught her breath with a sharp sound, and her fingers grasped the frame of the door convulsively. She could not cry out; her lips were parched and her tongue dry. But her whole soul went out to him through her eyes. Was it a dream? Was he a phantom? Could she be deceived by some marvelous resemblance? Oh, would he pass on without seeing her and vanish forever!

He had, in fact, walked on several paces, and in another minute he would be out of reach. But either accident or one of those mysterious mental impressions which many persons have experienced in some epoch of their lives caused him suddenly to pause, turn about, and look directly at the face in the carriage window. Their eyes met for a moment; then the woman covered her face with her hands, and sank back in her seat with a breathless cry of terror, bewilderment and intolerable joy.

The gentleman, who also seemed pale and agitated, came over to the road and laid his hand on the carriage door. "Drive on!" he said to the coachman, and with the words he entered the carriage and closed the door after him. Then he pulled down the shades over the windows. The coachman spoke to his horses, and they moved on.

This episode had taken place in a short space of time, and with very little visible manifestation of feeling on either side. Nevertheless, it had not entirely escaped observation. Two men had been sauntering along the path side by side, apparently whiling away the hour or two that separated them from dinner. One of them was a tall, slender, graceful fellow, with sharp but well molded features, black hair and mustache, and a pair of restless black eyes. He was dressed quietly, in dark colors, and yet there was a certain jauntiness in his appearance that suggested the sporting man or the sharper. His companion was a considerably older man, and his face was of a much coarser cast; his clothes were new, but fitted him ill, and he wore a flashy necktie and watch chain. His small gray eyes had noted the little occurrence above described, and as the carriage rolled away he nudged his friend with his elbow.

"Well, what now?" said the latter.

"Did you see that?"

"What?"

"Well, your wits are wool gathering, it seems. Did you see that fellow get into that carriage?"

"What carriage?"

"That carriage that was standing here just now with the lady in it. Why, what's got into you, Horrie? Don't you know who she was?"

"No, I don't. How should I?"

"Well, you might find it money in your pocket some day, that's all. Swell women like that don't drive out alone in the park for nothing, I reckon! And may be, rather than have their husbands know what they're after, they might see their way to paying an obliging person a consideration to keep his mouth shut."

"Oh, stuff! That business is played out. The swells are on to it, and the first word that's said they ring the bell for the police. I don't want any of that in mine, thank you! And if you want any one to believe you know all the ladies that drive in the park in their own broughams, you must find some greener hand than I am."

"I know who she was, just the same," retorted the other. "She's the girl that married that fellow Ketelle, a month ago."

"She?—the sister of that"— He stopped.

"The sister of Jerrold Nolen! You remember him, if I ain't mistaken," said the short man, with a chuckle.

"Yes, I remember him; and when the accounts are evened up I'll remember you too, Jack Grush, and don't you forget it!" exclaimed the black haired man, with a sullen fierceness. The fellow he had called Grush laughed but made no reply. "So that was his sister, was it?" the other went on, muttering to himself; "and she's married to the judge a month ago, and taking fellows to drive in her brougham!" He twisted the ends of his mustache, and switched the toe of his boot, as he sauntered along, with the light cane he carried.

Let us follow Mrs. Ketelle's carriage.

After the first few minutes of speechless and wild emotion were passed, Pauline relinquished her brother's hand, and shrank away from him to her side of the carriage. A reaction of feeling had come over her. She felt a sort of indignation that she should have been all these months grieving for a calamity that had never happened.

"Why did you never let us know that you were alive?" she demanded.

"I put it off from day to day," he said. "I had not decided, at first, what to do. I thought of coming home; then I thought that since I had been reported dead it was better to let it be believed so for a time, until the truth about the robbery should be discovered. Besides, I knew that detectives would be after me, and I feared that a letter addressed to you or to the judge might betray me. At last when I found something to do I decided to wait until I was certain of success before communicating with you. And finally, circumstances led to my coming back here unexpectedly myself."

"But Valentine might have written, if you could not."

"Valentine! Why, Pauline, don't you know—don't you see—it was Valentine who was drowned!"

"Valentine! Oh, God forgive me! how I have wronged him!" She turned aside and rested her face against the side of the carriage and sobbed for a few moments passionately. But she was never one to be long mastered by emotion. She forced back her tears, and said: "Tell me, tell me all!"

"The whole affair came about by an accident, without any prearrangement at all. When I went down to the pier of the steamship, Val had suggested my making one or two alterations in my dress and appearance, so that if any one were on the lookout for me I should pass for Valentine. Afterwards, on the steamer, we found that people were giving us each other's names, and we let it be so. We occupied the same state room and I used his things—I had brought very little of my own with me.

"On the voyage he told me all his private history; I afterwards thought that if he had been consciously training me to personate him he could not have done it more effectually. Then came the day of the hurricane. We were close together all the time until within a few minutes of the time the wind changed. We were in the cabin; there was a lantern buring, but it was almost quite dark. Val left me and went to our room. I could see him there; he seemed to be writing on something that he held up before him. Afterwards he went towards the steward's room, holding on by the iron pillars of the cabin as he went. That was the last I saw of him. He must have gone on deck—for what I can't imagine—and been swept overboard. No one knew anything of it until the next morning."

"Now I know—now I know!" murmured Pauline, pressing her hands over her heart. "It was he—he did not forget—I might have known it!"

"What might you have known?" asked her brother.

"Nothing; go on. When you found that he was dead what then?"

"We had agreed before to go to Mexico. He had letters and papers. I took them and went traveling as Valentine Martin. I saw that in that way I should get a standing in the place which I could not have obtained for myself, and that the report of my death would throw off the police. I was cordially received in Mexico, and put in the way of doing some valuable business. Everything prospered with me, as it had never done before. The story is too long to tell fully now; but in the midst of my success an extraordinary thing occurred; an English agent of the Martin estate came over and told me—supposing me to be Valentine—that by my brother's death I was the heir. I did not wish to enter into explanations, so I simply told him that I did not want the estate, and that it might go to the next of kin. I had forgotten that Val had a wife, though, of course, I knew all about her. She had ruined his life in more ways than one, and was no better than she should be; but if his death were known she would be entitled to a share of the estate. It seems she had got wind of the English agent's business, and had followed him from New Zealand. I had a curious interview with her; she charged me finally with having made away with her husband in order by personating him to get his property, and treating my assertion that I was not going to touch the property as mere buncombe. But the next day I got a letter from her in which she actually offered, in case I would make common cause with her, to go to England, prove her marriage to Valentine, get the estate and then divide with me!"

"Poor Valentine!" murmured Pauline, with a trembling lip.

"When I refused she declared war, and said she would expose me as an impostor and probable murderer. She learned that I was manager and part owner of a valuable mine that I had discovered near Pachuca. The other owners were two high officers of the government. She went to them with her story. They told me what she had said. I had already made up my mind what to do; I gave them the whole history of what had happened since Valentine and I had left New York; I told them what he had told me about his wife, and then I showed them the letter she had just written me. I knew I was risking everything in making a clean breast of it, but the fact was I was tired of living under a name that did not belong to me, and I wanted to put an end to it at all hazards."

"I am glad of that!" said Pauline.

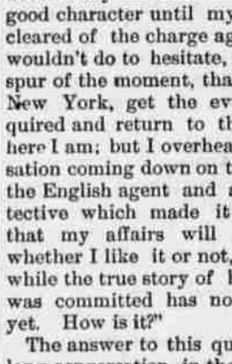
"They were rather upset by the story, and for a while I thought the affair would go against me. But I suspect they considered me too useful a man to lose. I was making a great deal of money for them and doing all the work, and then the woman's letter tipped the beam. They said finally that they would accept me for what I was if I could give them satisfactory proof that I was what I declared myself to be. Let me show letters or vouchers from reputable persons in New York bearing out my account of myself and they would accept me as a full equivalent for what I had pretended to be. I had a power of attorney that Val had given me on the steamer, but of course I could not tell them what had led to my leaving New York. I could not ask any one here for a certificate of good character until my name had been cleared of the charge again it. But it wouldn't do to hesitate, so I said, on the spur of the moment, that I would go to New York, get the evidence they required and return to them with it. So here I am; but I overheard some conversation coming down on the boat between the English agent and a New York detective which made it seem probable that my affairs will be investigated whether I like it or not, and that meanwhile the true story of how the robbery was committed has not been revealed yet. How is it?"

The answer to this question led to a long conversation, in the course of which Percy learned all that had happened during his absence, including Pauline's marriage. The search for the thief for whose crime he had suffered had as yet met with no success, but it was still being carried on. After discussing the matter, it was decided that Percy's presence in the city should, for the moment, be kept a secret from every one, even from his mother and Judge Ketelle. He should conceal himself in lodgings in the upper part of the town, where Pauline could visit him from time to time, and report the progress of affairs, and learn, if possible, from Inspector Byrnes, what were the object and result of the English agent Clifton's mission to New York. There might be difficulties in the way, but the brother and sister were young and believed that the longest lane has a turning.

It was late when Pauline drove up to the door of her house, and, alighting, walked up the steps of the porch. Her mind was full of her brother, and she did not notice the tall man with the black mustache who stood on the corner of the street tapping his boot with his cane.

CHAPTER XX.

A CHECK.



HAVING seen the lady into the house, the man with the black mustachios turned on his heel and sauntered away.

Black Horace (as he was known to his intimates) was not born to a criminal career, and his present position and character were the result partly of innate evil and partly of circumstances. He had received an excellent education and had graduated from the New York Medical school in good standing. Up to that time, beyond a tendency to loose company and irregular habits, he had developed no noticeably bad tendencies. The chances were that he would outgrow his youthful follies and become a useful member of society.

Almost immediately upon his graduation, however, his destiny took a sinister turn. At a parting supper with his comrades he got into a quarrel with one of them, ending in a scuffle in which blows were exchanged. The quarrel was patched up and the two antagonists shook hands and drank together, but Horace secretly bore a grudge and was determined to "get even." At the end of the evening, his late antagonist being somewhat the worse for liquor, Horace volunteered to see him home. They walked off together, Horace revolving in his mind the scheme of some practical joke.

That night Horace's companion was found insensible on his doorstep with the mark of a blow from a slungshot behind his ear. He never entirely recovered consciousness, and died the next day after uttering the name of Horace Dupee.

Horace was arrested on a charge of murder, and in default of bail was thrown into prison. After a long series of delays extending over a year, he was brought to trial and acquitted. The evidence, though amounting to a strong probability, was not conclusive, and the jury gave him the benefit of the doubt. He went forth nominally a free man, but his social and professional career were blasted ere they had fairly begun. The shadow of the mark of Cain, if not the mark itself, was upon him.

He might have changed his name and and achieved success in another country. But half from sullen obstinacy, half from lack of business energy, he did not do this. Instead, he drifted into bad society and soon found himself in harmony with it. The class of society in which he had formerly moved ceased to know him. The police began to take an interest in him, but he was shrewd and cautious enough to avoid falling into their hands. Some of his escapes were very narrow, but up the present time his photograph had not appeared in the rogue's gallery. In such a case, however, detection is sure to come sooner or later. Some oversight is committed, some "pal" turns state's evidence, or some fatality occurs.

Since the time of his downfall Horace Dupee had wandered from place to place and lived in most states of the Union. But again and again he returned to New York, though he knew that he ran greater risks there than elsewhere. At the time we come up with him he had been absent from the city for nearly a year. It was on the day after his arrival that his companion, Grush, had called his attention to Mrs. Ketelle.

She was the sister of the man of whose murder he had been accused. This fact was sufficient to inspire him with animosity against her. He had never seen her before. The only member of the family with whom he had ever come in personal contact was Jerrold Nolen. But he owed them all a grudge. If it had not been for them he might have had a successful career. He was prepared, therefore, to do her whatever ill turn came in his way. It was an additional motive that the ill turn to her could be made of advantage to himself. Grush had suggested this, and though he had turned aside the suggestion he considered it none the less. There was no need of letting Grush into the affair. In secret councils was safety. Besides Grush had no claims upon him—quite the contrary; he, too, was associated with whatever was disastrous in his life. He made up his mind to carry out his purpose without saying anything to Grush about it.

Several days passed. One afternoon Mrs. Ketelle left her house and took a Fourth avenue car uptown. She left it in the neighborhood of Harlem, walked across town a couple of blocks and entered the door of a small flat that formed part of an unfinished block on a side street. She remained there for upwards of an hour. Twilight was beginning to fall when she came out.

She had not walked far when she heard a step behind her, and a voice said, "Good evening, Mrs. Ketelle. How is the judge today?"

She turned and saw at her side a well dressed man of dark complexion, who fixed his eyes upon her in a manner she did not like. But his knowledge of her name and of her husband led her to suppose that she must have met him somewhere and forgotten him. "You must excuse me, sir," she said, "but you have the advantage of me."

"Indeed, I believe you are right," he answered, with a short laugh. "The advantage is all on my side. But tell me, Mrs. Ketelle, how does married life suit you? Does the judge come up to your expectations? For my part I should think twice before marrying a woman so much younger than myself. By the time you are coming into full bloom the judge will be in the sere and yellow leaf. But I suppose you know how to manage him. He hasn't betrayed any symptoms of the green eyed monster yet, has he?"

This speech produced such astonishment in Pauline that she could not find words to interrupt it. But when the speaker paused she stood still and looked him curiously in the face.

"You don't seem to be intoxicated," she said at length. "You may be crazy. Whatever you are, I advise you to go. I do not want you."

"No, I suppose not," he replied, returning her glance insolently. "I am not the lucky man. The judge has no cause to be jealous of me. But, on the other hand, I may be of some use to him. Of course, it will be a pity to spoil your little game. You have managed it all so nicely, even to providing him with lodgings; and he is such a fine looking young fellow, and it is all so lovely and romantic. But, you see, I have a high regard for the judge, and I can't bear to see him made a fool of. These billings and cooings in the park and assignations in flats—they must be stopped. Society won't stand it. And the best way to stop it that I can think of is to tell Judge Ketelle."

Pauline listened to all this attentively, at first with a dreadful fear that this unknown man had become acquainted with the fact that her brother had returned to New York. But as he went on she perceived that he supposed Percy to be her lover; and then his object became clear. A deep blush overspread her face. That she should be thought capable, even by a wretch who did not know her, of an illicit intrigue, filled her with horror and anger. But underneath this feeling there was another and a more powerful one. It was a feeling of relief and joy that her brother was safe, at least that she could save him by the sacrifice (so far as this man was concerned) of her reputation as a pure woman. By letting him continue to suppose that it was an ordinary intrigue in which she was engaged, and paying him for his silence—for she divined that it was for that purpose he had accosted her—she could keep Percy's secret until the time arrived when it might safely be divulged. The sacrifice was perhaps as arduous a one as an honest woman could be called upon to make; but there was no hesitation in her mind as to whether or not she should make it.

"I have heard that there were such persons as you, but I never saw one before," she said. "You are a blackmailer, are you not?"

There was something in her tone that touched a sore spot in him, callous and degraded though he had become. To see her beautiful face and angry eyes gazing straight into his, and to feel that her contempt for him was far too great for her to make any attempt to express it in words, was an experience that even he found trying. He remembered, with a pang of hopeless rage, that he might have so lived as to have the right to meet this lovely woman on terms of social equality, and to win her respect and perhaps her regard. As it was, it was impossible for one human being to despise another more than she despised him. And yet what right had she to despise him if she were herself reprehensible before society? The thought hardened him again.

"I see you are up to business as well as to some other things," he said. "I have my living to make; you are paid for by your husband and amuse yourself by deceiving him If he divorces you, you may find out what it is to make your own way in the world; as long as your good looks last no doubt it will be easy; but after that you may be ready to take a few lessons from me. But meantime I intend to bleed you for what I want. As soon as you get tired of paying me I shall go to the judge—and you will go to the devil. Is that plain?"

"Yes, I understand you. You will certainly earn your money," she remarked, with a smile that made him grind his teeth. "Well, then, I will pay you for your silence. Now, as to the amount. Have you thought about that?"

"You will hand over five hudred dollars this evening. I will let you know when I want any more."

"No," she said decisively, "I will not give you five hundred dollars. That is absurd."

"Either that, or your husband knows all about your performances before he goes to bed to-night."

"Very well. But recollect that by betraying me to him you will free me from every restraint and scruple. I suppose you don't need to be told that I am not kindly disposed toward you. The pleasure of destroying you would compensate me for the loss of social position you speak of. While you are with my husband I shall be with Inspector Byrnes. I promise you faithfully that you shall suffer the utmost penalty of the law, and after the law has done with you I will take you in hand myself. When that time comes you will wish that the law had kept you longer. You will never draw a breath that is not free from pain and terror as long as you live. Look at me, sir. Don't you think I mean what I say?"

The quietness of anger at white heat was in her eyes and voice, and it scared the man somewhat, as it would have scared a much more doughty rascal. He forced a laugh and struck his boot with his cane. After a moment she turned and resumed her walk up the street.

He remained where he was until she was half a block distant. Then he hastened after her and overtook her.

"Look here, Mrs. Ketelle," he said, "business is business. I'm not a fool. Tell me what you can do, and I'll give you my answer."

She replied at once, continuing her walking, but keeping her eyes upon him as she spoke. "I am allowed by my husband fifty dollars a week pocket money. I will pay you twenty dollars a week until in my opinion you have had enough. I will pay you your first month's wages in advance—eighty dollars. You must be careful not to apply for more until the month is out. Those are my terms."

"They won't do!" said he, blusteringly. "You'll pay me two hundred now and fifty a week, or it's no deal! Come, now!"

"If you address me again, except to accept my proposition, I will have you arrested, come what may!" The color rushed to her face and her eyes flashed. She was losing her temper, and she was evidently in earnest.

He was silent a moment, and then shrugged his shoulders. "All right, I'll take it," he said. "Hand over the money."

"I do not carry that amount in my purse," she returned quietly.

"How am I to get it, then?"

"You will come to my house like any other person to whom things are paid. Did you think I was going to make appointments to meet you at the street corners, or in liquor saloons? My husband will pay you."

"Your husband! Look here, Mrs. Ketelle, you are a smart woman; but if you think you can play any game on me, you are mistaken. You have more at stake than I have. Don't try to bluff me!"

"If I have the most at stake, why do you feel uneasy? You will receive your money in that way, or not at all. It is just as you choose."

They had now reached the corner of the avenue; Pauline signaled the down town car that was approaching, and got in. The man followed her. She handed the conductor a double fare, remarking, "I am paying for that person."

No conversation passed while they were in the car. Dupee was ill at ease, but he could not see but that he had the best of the situation. She could not afford to betray him. On the other hand, what if Judge Ketelle should happen to know him by sight? No; he was certain they had never met; the judge had taken no part in his trial, either as witness or jurist. Besides, again, was it not her interest to protect him?

The car stopped, and they got out and walked across to her house. The door was opened to her ring, and they entered.

"Is Judge Ketelle in?" she asked the servant.

"Yes, madam. He has just gone into the library."

"Sit down here," she said to Dupee, addressing him as if he were a tradesman's clerk who had called for his bill. "I will let you know when it is ready."

She passed through a door on the right, leaving him there. Presently he heard her voice and another—the judge's—in conversation. Then she opened another door further up the hall and called to him, "Come this way, please."

He went forward, and found himself in the library. The judge was seated at a writing table on which stood a student's lamp. He was in the act of taking his check book from a drawer.

"What amount did you say, my dear?" he inquired, suspending his pen over the inkstand.

"Eighty dollars," she replied.

The judge began to write. "What name?" he inquired, looking up at Dupee, who stood somewhat in the shadow.

"What is your name?" Mrs. Ketelle repeated.

Dupee now fancied he knew why she had brought him to the house. In the first place, the check could be traced; then the judge could be called to prove that it had been paid to him; and, finally, she had hoped to surprise him into betraying his name. But he had gone too far to go back; and as for the name, that was easily managed. It was partly from a malicious motive that he answered:

"My name is John Grush."

"John Grush," echoed the judge, writing it down. He signed the check and extended it toward Dupee. "Have you receipted the bill?" he asked.

Dupee looked at Mrs. Ketelle. "I did not get a bill," she said. "The check is itself a receipt, is it not?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure," rejoined her husband. "Well, that's all right, then; that's all!"

"You may go," said Mrs. Ketelle, glancing at Dupee as if he were a piece of furniture. When she heard the street door close, she went round to her husband and kissed him. "You are very good," she said.

"What—to give you eighty dollars without asking you what you had bought?" he returned, laughing.

"Yes; but you shall know some time."

"My dearest, I am not curious; I only want you to love me. Do you know," he added, "I can't get it out of my head that I have met that fellow—that clerk who was here just now—that I have seen him somewhere before—and under odd circumstances, too."

"Where?" said she, startled and deeply interested.

"Hum! I can't fix it! Maybe I shall remember later. But it's no consequence, after all. Now one more kiss, and I'll go and get ready for dinner."

(Continued next Week.)